

Members of the Prevent Network

10 February 2021

Dear Prevent Practitioner

I wanted to drop you a note to say how honoured I am to lead this important Independent Review of Prevent. I am very much aware that it is a huge responsibility.

My predecessor Lord Carlile QC and his fine team drawn from the Home Office had already gathered a lot of material before he stepped down one year ago. I am very lucky to have inherited both his team and all that work, including the public call for evidence he commissioned.

The aim of the Review is to look at the effectiveness of present strategies to protect vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism and make recommendations for the future. The UK faces a range of terrorist threats - including from Islamist and the Far Right - and I am keen to learn more what role Prevent can play in helping address such threats. The Review is non-partisan and I want to hear from and listen to a wide range of voices from across our different communities. I think the Review is an important opportunity to understand the views of both critics and supporters of Prevent.

I am open minded and want to hear all the evidence. And I want to hear the case for Prevent openly and based on evidence that can be tested. I am in the process of considering the views on the terms of reference provided since the Review was first set up and hope that the refreshed terms of reference will be agreed and published, including when I aim to complete my work, shortly.

The key to a credible review is to learn from the experiences of you, Prevent practitioners across the country, the civil society organisations delivering Prevent and also from individuals who have been supported or otherwise impacted by the strategy. I know that Prevent is a controversial issue and one which, at times, has aroused animosity and suspicion. I want to better understand that – and much more!

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You may be wondering about me.

I have been a writer and journalist most of my life. My first book centred on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and my most recent, *Justice and the Enemy*, on the Nuremberg trials, the 9/11 attacks, and the trial of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Terrorism, whatever its source, inflicts terrible wounds on souls as well as bodies. In *Justice and the Enemy*, I focused on the devastating effects of terrorism and the long series of criminal assaults perpetrated by Islamist terrorists on the world. I noted that the most appalling impact was sustained by Muslims all over the world.

This is just one of the reasons that it is vital to distinguish between the historic religion of Islam – a source of enrichment for many around the world – and the political ideology of Islamism. This is a key point, and one I wish to reiterate.

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In much of my writing, I have been concerned with the protection of human rights and democratic institutions. I became the founding Chair of Article 19, The International Centre on Censorship in 1986, and I helped set up the International Crisis Group in the mid 1990s. I also served on the board of the Disasters Emergency Committee, the umbrella organisation of leading UK aid agencies which deals with humanitarian crises.

In 2012, I began a six year term chairing the Charity Commission. When I took it over, the Commission was in a tough place – facing financial and organisational strain. I had an urgent task to rebuild it and restore public trust.

We faced further challenges from conflicts underway overseas. The war in Syria was attracting people and money from Muslim communities and others all over the West. I worked closely with imams, Muslim MPs, Counter Terrorism policing and others to protect Islamic charities and Muslim communities from exploitation by ISIS and other extremist organisations. I am very proud of what we did to help Muslim charities and individuals at that time.

Above all, I hope my work at the Commission served to protect and enhance Britain's unique philanthropic tradition.

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Terrorism is designed to tear societies apart. And I am sure that you, like me, you think constantly of the victims - all those murdered or wounded at the Ariana Grande

concert, and their families; the relatives of those young British Muslims enticed to fight for ISIS in Syria; Jo Cox and her family and other victims of far right terrorism such as the attack at Finsbury Park mosque in 2017 in Britain.

We all have an interest in wishing to prevent such tragedies from occurring again and again. That is just one of the reasons as to why I am proud to have been chosen to review Prevent.

I look forward to discussing all these matters with as many of you as possible. If you want to get in touch, please email my team at: enquiries@preventreview.independent.gov.uk

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Shawcross". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William Shawcross

Independent Reviewer of Prevent

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